

Australian PM denounces China and announces \$10 billion nuclear submarine base

Mike Head
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Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison yesterday exploited the Russian invasion of Ukraine to launch another major military buildup, starting with building a \$10 billion base for US, UK and Australian nuclear-powered submarines on Australia's east coast, clearly directed at preparing for war against China.

While spending virtually nothing on relief and assistance for the tens of thousands of victims of the floods devastating people throughout large areas of Australia's east, the Liberal-National government is pouring billions of dollars more into military preparations.

Morrison, who has supported every US-led invasion and regime-change operation for decades—from the Balkans to Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya and Syria—declared that Russia and China constitute an “arc of autocracy” that is threatening the “rules-based international order.”

This turns reality on its head. Washington and its allies are resorting to militarism, including the expansion of NATO to Russia's borders, to seek to provoke confrontations with the states regarded as a threat to the hegemony the US gained through World War II.

The “rules-based order,” which Morrison falsely depicted as one of “peace and stability” and “free from coercion,” is actually one dominated by the US imperialism that sets the rules according to its economic and strategic interests.

The label “arc of autocracy” is a warning of war plans. It is reminiscent of former US President George W. Bush calling Iran, North Korea and Iraq an “axis of evil” in 2002, as the US pretext for the invasion and destruction of Iraq, which caused an estimated one million deaths.

In a speech to the Lowy Institute, a Sydney-based think tank, Morrison ramped up his Coalition government's accusations against China, depicting it as complicit in the Ukraine invasion, as part of a plot to dominate the globe. He alleged that Beijing was providing Putin's government with a “lifeline” by allowing wheat exports

from Russia and by refusing to line up with the condemnation and sanctions against Russia by the US and other imperialist powers.

The prime minister emphasised that Australia is actively participating in the developing war against Russia, boasting that “our missiles are on the ground now.” That was a reference to the \$70 million already sent to NATO to supply the Ukrainian regime with lethal weapons.

The construction of a nuclear submarine base on the east coast, to operate in addition to the existing Indian Ocean submarine base near Perth, Western Australia, is part of plans for a US-led military conflagration with China. Morrison said the base would “enable the regular visiting of US and UK nuclear-powered submarines.”

This flows from the AUKUS agreement signed between the three countries last September for a closer integration of their forces against China, including the provision of nuclear-powered attack submarines to Australia for the first time.

The strategic significance of the new base was underscored by the *Wall Street Journal*, which began its report as follows: “Australia is planning to build a new naval base on its east coast that could offer resupply and maintenance to American nuclear submarines, increasing the capabilities of both countries in countering China in the Indo-Pacific region.”

The article noted that the US wanted to “make Australia more central to its strategy for the Indo-Pacific” against China. It reported: “During bilateral talks between Australia and the US last year, officials said they wanted to enhance air, land and sea cooperation, including increasing logistics and support capabilities of US naval vessels in Australia.”

Without providing any details, Morrison said the base would provide submarines with specialised wharves, maintenance facilities, administrative and logistics support, personal amenities and suitable accommodation

for submarine crews and ancillary staff, including from the US and UK.

While complaining of not being briefed in advance, opposition Labor Party leader Anthony Albanese, reiterated his party's support for AUKUS and the acquisition of nuclear submarines. His only criticism was that the government was acting too slowly.

"Today's announcement is really an announcement about an announcement," he said yesterday. "What we actually need is announcements that lead to actual infrastructure and announcements that lead to actual defence materiel being realised."

Ordinary people in the three port cities short-listed by the government as sites for the base—Brisbane, Newcastle and Wollongong—have already raised concerns. Fears are being expressed throughout social media that the nuclear submarine base could become a target in any nuclear war, along with existing US facilities, such as the Pine Gap satellite communications base in central Australia.

In these cities, as elsewhere, there is a long history of working-class opposition to nuclear war and preparations for it. As a result, the three city councils have formally declared themselves "nuclear-free zones" since the 1980s or 1990s. However, they have no legal power to enforce bans on nuclear weapons and infrastructure against the federal and state governments.

The government's \$10 billion allocation for the base will be part of boosted military spending to be unveiled in the planned March 29 federal budget, just weeks before a scheduled national election. Morrison said the government was already "investing \$578 billion in the nation's Defence Force over the next decade, including over \$280 billion in enhanced defence capability."

On Sunday, Defence Minister Peter Dutton, who is vying to replace the increasingly unpopular Morrison, again sought to outbid the prime minister in anti-China witch hunting. Dutton said he was concerned by the "alliance" between China and Russia and claimed Beijing was "amassing nuclear weapons."

Interviewed on the Australian Broadcasting Corporation's "Insiders" television program, Dutton suggested providing direct military support to Taiwan, which is still recognised by the US and its allies as part of China. He outlined a Cold War-era domino theory that Russia and China would seek wider conquests if they succeeded in Ukraine and Taiwan: "The question is, as it is in the Ukraine at the moment, if it's Taiwan does it just stop there?"

Dutton said a decision on whether to purchase US or

UK submarines would be made "within the next couple of months," that is, before the next federal election due by May, dramatically cutting short the timeframe previously announced by Morrison.

Morrison's speech failed to win the backing of some prominent figures closely associated with the US. Greg Sheridan, the foreign editor of the Murdoch media's *Australian*, today said it was "one of the most profoundly disappointing prime ministerial speeches in modern times."

Like Albanese, Sheridan insisted that the submarine-acquisition and basing plans were too far into the future. "In announcing a never-never base for a never-never sub, the government has determined it will do nothing in the immediate or even middle distance future," he wrote.

Sheridan did not stop there. He declared that Australia's "military force structure" had not changed despite the Ukraine crisis and "apparently will not change under this government."

This is a further warning, on top of the recent promotion of Albanese by Sheridan and the *Australian Financial Review* (AFR), that elements within the ruling class are moving to back a Labor-led and trade union-backed government as a means of prosecuting war and imposing the resulting deep attacks on working-class conditions, as Labor governments did in both world wars.

The editorial in today's AFR provided a whiff of how the wealthy corporate elite is already seizing on the Ukraine crisis to intensify its decades-long offensive against workers and social spending. It said the "seismic global shock" in Ukraine had produced the "jolt" needed to pursue "incentive-sharpening structural tax and workplace reform."

Invoking wartime language, the editorial said "hard 'guns versus butter' choices" were needed. That meant doubling military spending, while ending the "addiction" of the political system to "promising more money for endless worthy causes."



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